

[L. E. Smith]

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[?] FOLK STUFF - RANGE LORE PHRASES & SAYINGS - DIALECT

Phipps, Woody

Rangelore

Tarrant Co., Dist. #7 [79?]

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L.E. Smith, 81, was born on a farm in New Jersey. His uncle reared him as his parents died in his infancy. He ran away from home at 18, gradually working his way South until he reached Texas in 1883. He was employed as a cowboy on the 101 Ranch in San Saba Co. The next Yr., he was employed on the Bonner Ranch in San Saba, then the next five Yrs. by C.A. O:Keefe, a Ft. Worth cattleman who operated a ranch in Dawson Co., Tex. He was then employed on several ranches by Winfield Scott, Mt. Worth cattleman who dealt in ranches and cattle. After 10 Yrs. with Scott, Smith retired from the range and now resides in Silverton, Texas. His story:

"Sure, I rode the range. Rode it when a man was a cow puncher and not a ranch hand. These cowboys today, they've got the name but they never went through the [soughs?]. In my day, when we wanted hosses, we went to the hills and caught 'em. Didn't have no pen to run 'em around in, either. The way we'd do, was to have the gang close in, one or two to lasso the hoss we thought was best if we had more than one, then the one that needed the hoss got off, slapped his hull on the wild one and rode him. If you didn't stay with him, you more than likely let him get away, and you were out a hoss. We generally stayed with them

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once we got into the hull, 'til they pitched plum out and were so tuckered out they could hardly stand.

"I wasn't what they call, 'born to the range,' but I came to it as a young man and gave the best part of my life to it. You see, I was born on my dad's farm in New Jersey, but both my parents shoved off while I was still a little shaver, and my uncle took me over. I didn't take to being bound over to him, and just as soon's I was 18, I lit out for the wide open spaces.

"I done my first riding for the great Western Cattle Co. in Kansas. C12 - 2/11/41 - Texas 2 They didn't run a brand of their own but bought from ranchers all over the country, then fed 'em out in winter feed lots and grazed 'em on their Eastern Kansas cattle range, where the grazing was bounteous.

"After some time, I quit the Great Western and rode on South on my own hoss and saddle. By the way, I won that hoss and saddle in a roping contest a [little?] over a year after I saw my first lasso and cow pony. You see, I had to have a job, and the closest job was with the Great Western if I could ride, so I bargained with them if they'd feed me 'til I learnt, I wouldn't be long in learning and I'd make 'em a good hand. Yep, that's the way of it.

"Well, I reckon 'twas along in the Summer of '83 when I crossed over into Texas and lit on the 101 Ranch in San Saba county. The Murray Brothers owned the spread and ran a bank and a big mercantile store in San Saba. They both ram rodded the spread, and ran between four and 5,000 head in the 101 iron.

"I never did really cotton to the spread after I went to work there. Seemed to me like somebody wanted to make a lot of money on a little time and effort. The grass was awful short, and the cattle skittish and half starved, so you could expect a stomp most anytime you had over 10 of 'em rounded up in a herd. They'd sure stampede. I made the Fall round up, then worked through the winter but by Spring round up, I'd left the 101 and went to work for old Captain Bonner.

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"Cap ran more to hosses than he did to cattle, buying, selling, trapping and trading them all the time. He did have about 300 head of stockers, though, and about 300 head of hosses. All in 3 his 'OM' iron. I done an awful lot of bronc busting in the short time I was there, taking over where his regular hoss buster turned 'em loose for a little more breaking. Many's the time I'd ride 'em 'til I had the nose bleed so bad I'd get weak, an' my guts'd seem to be about ready to bust out. My shins, too, they'd be plum raw all the time I worked with them hosses. You see, where you ride them wild ones, you had to grip as hard as you could with your knees and your clothes would wrinkle up. Every where you'd have a wrinkle in your pants, you had the skin rubbed off'n your leg. No real bronc buster ever rode the wild ones with chaps on. Those things were to protect your legs when you rode through the chaparral.

"That seemed to be a little too hard a way to go through life, so I chucked the spread and lit out for Fort Worth after the Fall roundup. While in here, I hired to old man C.A. O:Keefe, who was a big cattle buyer and owned the 'Fish Ranch.' I calc'late he run 4,000 head in the Fish iron, made like this: . Headquarters for the ranch stood right where Lamesa Texas, in Dawson Co., stands right this day.

"Henry Mason was the ram rod and wagon boss too, and a better rider, roper, or shot, I never saw in my life, and I've seen a many a one and been in a couple of squeezes where he would have come in handy. I didn't stay on the spread myself, but went with O:Keefe to handle the shipping end of his buying.

"O'Keefe and I rode several 100 miles down into Mexico after beef, but he bought the most of it from old Uncle Tom [Snydey?], who ran a ranch about 100 Mi. S. of the line, and from old man Caufield, who ran a spread about 90 Mi. S. of Bisbee, Arizona, in Mexico. 4 "Now, I don't recall just how big their spreads were, nor how many cattle they run. The only thing I can tell you clear enough about, is that we bought the cattle 'range delivery,' and their men drove them to the rail roads. I handled the rail road end of it, and always had the cars

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spotted when I could get them. Then O'Keefe'd have the cattle roaded to one of his feeder spots, and he had a number of them in Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona.

"He'd feed them out, then ship to market. That was the way he done business. One of the New Mexico feeder spots was next to the Hittson Ranch. Jack and Della Hittson owned it, she being Jack's wife. They were both good riders, and handled wild hosses all the time. She'd ride hosses I couldn't even look at, and I was considered some shakes when it come to riding the wild ones. The ones I never liked to mess around with, were those you'd come acrost once in awhile, that wouldn't tame. Outlaws. That's what we called them ornery son-of-a-guns. They'd finally tame if they never killed anybody in the meantime, and maybe even then they'd tame. I've seen any number of wild hosses that were never tamed, and killed from one to three or four men before somebody cut down on then with a six shooter.

"Della is still living, running a hotel in Amarillo. Jack got killed while penning a bunch of wild hosses. You see, that was when barb wire first came into New Mexico, and neither Jack nor the hoss were used to it being around, and the hoss ran into the wire, Jack fell off and broke his neck.

"Barb wire is a hard thing to get used to, and is hard to see when you've got your mind on penning stock. In fact, if it wasn't for the posts, you'd never think of wire while working stock. 5 The Hittson spread was a mighty nice one, but didn't run entirely to stock. They ran around 1,500 head of stockers, 1,000 head of hosses, and around 10,000 sheep.

"I reckon I worked with O'Keefe for five years before I hired out to old man Winfield Scott, a Fort Worth cattleman that dealt in cattle and ranches, too. He had at least three big ones while I was with him, and about 20 feeder spots in N.M. and Texas. He owned the Hat Ranch on the N.M. border, the O.D. Ranch which was located where Coke Co. is now, and the Scott Ranch near Fort Worth.

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"Now, I never paid no attention to how many head, or how big these ranches were, because I kept on the road nigh onto all the time, buying up stock for Scott.

"I bought from all the ranches I could get any beef from. Among the big deals I handled for Scott, were those with the Yellow House Ranch, up in the Panhandle near the Yellow House Canyon. Old Dick Arnett ram rodded that spread, and managed another called the Renderbrook Ranch, just South of Colorado City, Texas. He was one of the best pistol shots, riders and ropers that Texas ever produced. Another thing, he had as much sand in his craw as any other man I ever met. If he thought there might be a little rustling going on somewhere, and he might not get there before he could get some hands to go with him, he'd light out alone, and fit them rustlers to a fare ye well. He'd do it. Now, I can't recall any certain time he done this, but he's done it a number of times, and it was on the strength of his guts that old Bill Elwood gave him the ram rodding job in the first place.

"Old Dick done like the rest of us, though. He got too 6 old one day, and Bill put him out to pasture, and made my nephew, O.C. Jones, or, Otto, to ram rodding them spreads. After Bill died, the Elwood Estate put him manager over it all, and he holds the job today.

"You know, when you're out buying up cattle, nothing much'll ever happen to you. It used to be mighty interesting when we had range delivery, where the rancher signed a contract to have so many head at such and such a spot for so much a head, and you always took his word. What broke that up was when a few started to cutting short a herd on range delivery, and when a man sold them, and had to tally them to the man he sold to, he lost money so that knocked the old range delivery in the head.

"If I could recall all that ever happened way back yonder in my time, you'd have a-plenty to write about but you can bet your boots that I've been a cowboy with the best of them. This morning here at the Stock Show, a young upstart with fancy boots, and the rest of the finery these here drug store cowboys wear, happened to notice that I wore boots, and he said, Hay!, pop. Did you ever straddle a cayuse?"

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"I didn't answer that one, but asked one instead. I said, 'If a cow was running by you and her left side was to you, which leg would you lasso?' He studied a minute, and the gang ribbed him so bad he walked off with his face red as a beet. He couldn't answer that one, and its a natural to anyone that's ever roped as much as a month. That's why I said they had the name but didn't go through the roughs. And I've got the name, and I've been there. I don't know, and there's no way of checking, but I reckon I've sent more cattle to market than ary other man a-living.